

Isaiah 55:4-5

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[0 : 0 0] If you could open your Bibles with me to Isaiah chapter 55. It's always a good thing to have your Bible open at the passage that we're considering. I think this evening it will be particularly helpful to have it open and for you to be focused on it as we, I guess, try and disentangle, I don't know if that's the right verb, some of what we find in the two verses in question that hopefully, as we do, will help us to have a better sense of what is being said.

But it will involve grappling somewhat with these two verses and your participation will be necessary. So, if you sit back and just listen, you probably won't get much from it. If you engage with the text with me, I'm sure you'll get a lot more from it. So, if we have our Bibles open and we'll home in on what we want to look at this evening. Now, just reminding ourselves of this morning, this morning we were listening as God extended to us a beautiful invitation, the words with which this chapter begins.

It's come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters and you who have no money, come buy and eat, come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fair. Give ear and come to me, hear me that your soul may live.

And we were thinking about that invitation. Hopefully, we were receiving and responding to that invitation. And as we were giving thought to it this morning, we marveled at something of what God graciously offers to do for us. Water to refresh, milk to nourish, wine to gladden our souls. And we discovered that the water and the milk and the wine are not simply provided by God, but that God Himself is the one who, in and through Jesus, refreshes and nourishes and gladdens His people. And the focus is very much on what God can and does do for us. Now, this evening, as we continue our exploration of the chapter, we'll, I suppose, complement our discoveries from this morning concerning what God does for us with what God makes us part of. And these things are not really at all separate, but we can maybe make that distinction. This morning, what God does for us, He refreshes, He nourishes,

He gladdens. This evening, we're going to see something of what God makes us part of. And what I have in mind here is the language of the second half of verse 3. In verse 3, you have this concluding call of the invitation, give ear and come to me. It becomes very real, very personal. Come to me, hear me that your soul may live. And then what follows are these words, I will make an everlasting covenant with you. God is really describing what this life that He is inviting the thirsty to experience will be like, what it will involve. And it involves being part of this everlasting covenant with God. It involves being brought in to God's covenant community. It involves being brought in to God's kingdom of whom there is a king that is also spoken of. As the verse goes on, my faithful love promised to David. So, we're invited in to God's people. And it's really within the succor of God's people, within that community that we are refreshed and nourished and gladdened.

[4 : 10] And so, that's an important focus or element of the invitation that's extended to us. Now, as we continue on to look at what follows, and what follows tells us something about this kingdom that we have become part of. It tells us something about the king of the kingdom that we have become part of. It tells us something of what He's doing and something of what we are doing in partnership with Him, the verses that follow. But in order to understand what's going on, what we first need to do is that we need to identify the characters involved. Now, that involves identifying who is speaking in verses 4 and 5. It also involves identifying who He is speaking to and also who He is speaking about. Now, that all may sound a bit of a riddle. But let me just read through from 3b through to verse 5. And as I do, just identify the characters, not in the sense of saying who they are, but how they appear in these verses. And then we'll go on and try and identify who they are. Now, I hope that doesn't sound too confusing. But hopefully as we do it, it will become clear. So, I'm going to read through verses 3b through to 5 and just pause and just say, well, I wonder who this is. Okay? So, verse 3b, I will make an everlasting covenant with you. Well, already you have two characters there, the one who is speaking, I, and the one

He is speaking to. I will make an everlasting covenant with you. We read on, my faithful love promised to David. You have another character, seemingly rather simple to identify. Verse 4, see, I, presumably the same I of the previous verse, have made Him, so who's Him? We want to work out who Him is, a witness to the peoples.

So, here you have another character, not just an individual, but a group of people, the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples, presumably the same peoples. Then in verse 5, surely you will summon nations. Who is you? Who's that? You will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you. Who's you? Again, presumably the same you of earlier in that verse. Because the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for He has endowed you with splendor. Again, who is this you that's spoken of in verse 5? So, that's what we want to try and establish. Once we've done that, we'll move on and think about two of the characters and who they are and what they do and what they're about. So, first of all, I will make an everlasting covenant with you. Who is the I? Well, that's a simple one. That's God. You know, God is speaking. The same God who extends the invitation from the beginning of the chapter. He is continuing to speak. He is speaking. I, the one speaking, is God.

And He says, I will make an everlasting covenant with you. Now, the you there, presumably, is a reference to the thirsty, to those who are responding to the invitation. Because He's continuing, really, to address the thirsty. And He's saying what He's going to do for them. So, the you are God's people, those who respond to the invitation. Then He speaks about my faithful love promised to David.

Well, that's King David. Now, we're going to have to explore that a little bit more in a moment. But for the moment, we just leave it there. Then in verse 4, see I, well, that's God again, have made Him.

[7 : 57] So, who's Him? Well, grammatically, the Him most reasonably relates back to David. You know, in verse 3, in the second half of verse 3, the one speaking, God speaks of my faithful love promised to David.

And then He says, see, I have made Him. So, presumably, it relates back to David. But that leads us to a difficulty, because in what sense can what is said in these verses be true of David?

You know, when these verses were written, David was long gone. He was dead and buried. So, how can what is said about him be true of David? And I think the key to understand what's going on here is to understand what was promised to David. There, the second half of verse 3, it says, my faithful love promised to David. And the word translated faithful love is a word that's seldom used in the Old Testament and yet is very suggestive. It's really the plural form of the word *hesed*, which is translated love or grace or faithful love. And the word is almost entirely, it's hundreds of occurrences are almost always in the singular form. But here, and in a few other, very few other cases, in the plural form. And this kind of opens up this panorama of the multiple expressions and evidences of God's faithful love. So, a literal translation would be God's faithful loves.

Of course, that doesn't sound right. Sometimes some translations translated His tender mercies to acknowledge that the plural element. The point is that this love of God is multifaceted. It is plural in its expressions. And here, it's talking about this love promised to David. Now, what was David promised as an expression of God's faithful love for him? Well, he was promised an heir and an everlasting kingdom. We won't look at the passages that tell us that for reasons of time, but you're familiar with this reality. God promised to David as an expression of His love that He would have an heir, and that the kingdom of this heir would be an everlasting kingdom. Well, we know David had his son Solomon, who stood up to the throne, who took the throne following David's death. But of course, his kingdom, though a very successful one in many ways, was certainly not an everlasting kingdom. It was a lasting kingdom, I suppose, but certainly not everlasting. But of course, we know the identity of David's greater son and king of this promised everlasting kingdom, and that is Jesus, the son of David.

So, the hymn there in verse 4 is David's greater son, Jesus. See, I have made him a witness. Yes, the hymn refers back to David, but given what it goes on to say clearly, it's not speaking about the David who is now dead and buried, but is looking forward to his son, to Jesus. And it is Jesus who will do the things that are then described in this verse. So, that was maybe a slightly more involved identification process, I suppose, as we read through these verses.

[11 : 39] Then you also have, in what follows, the peoples. And the people spoken of there in verse 4, I think, can be understood as being equivalent to the nations, who are then spoken of in verse 5. And the word nations in particular is helpful because it's a Hebrew word that is used of Gentile nations, of all the nations bar Israel. So, all the other nations are being identified here, and they are the ones, they are the peoples, they are the nations who will be summoned by David's greater son. Then you come to verse 5, which is also tricky, because in verse 5, notice what it says, surely you will summon nations you know not. And our question is, well, who's the you? God is still speaking, but who is he addressing when he says, you will summon nations you know not? Now, it seems to me that the most reasonable identification of the you is with the him of the previous verse, who we've already identified as

Jesus. But I do think that there's a sense in which the you there in verse 5 could be understood, maybe in a secondary sense, as a reference to Israel, or for us today, the church. Jesus is going to summon the nations, but we will be involved with him in that task. So, we've identified the players. Now, let's see what is said about the king and the everlasting kingdom promised to David.

Jesus, the king of this everlasting kingdom, and also what is said about the citizens of this kingdom. That would be you and me. First of all, King Jesus. What is said about King Jesus? Well, how is he described? In verse 4, see, I have made him, we've already identified the him as Jesus, I have made him a witness to the peoples. Jesus came as the word of God to witness to the goodness of God. He is the bader of a message of good news from God. He's not only the bader of the message, he is the message. He doesn't just tell good news, he is the good news. He's a witness to this people.

And, of course, we see that in the life of Jesus. He was constantly speaking about himself in a way that if anybody else had done it, you would have said they have a real problem. He was always saying, look at me, this is who I am. You have the famous I am sayings in John Gospel, this preoccupation with himself in some regards. And there's a reason for that, because he is the good news, and not only a bearer of it. But the verse also describes Jesus as a leader of the peoples. And the word leader that's used there points to his divine appointment and authority. He is a leader appointed by God and with the authority of God. And then it goes on to speak of him as a commander, a leader and commander of the people. See, I have made him, Jesus, a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. And the word commander really is just the functional description of what a leader does.

A leader leads, a leader commands, and that is what Jesus does as he fulfills his mission. That's who he is. But what does the king do? Well, principally, what's identified here, we find there in verse 5. Surely you, remember we've concluded that the you is a reference to the him, that is Jesus. Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you. He summons the nations. And the language that the prophet uses points to both the extent and the effectiveness of this summons on the part of Jesus. Notice the extent of it. Nations you know, and nations that do not know you. And really this is just a way of saying every nation, however remote, however seemingly insignificant, nations in the back of beyond, every nation without exception is summoned by King Jesus to himself.

[16:07] That's what we see even today. You know, even today as we've prayed, we've been able to pray about Nepal and France and Uganda, and of course we've gone much further afield. All the nations of the world being summoned by King Jesus to himself to live under his gracious rule and authority, to be refreshed by him, to be nourished by him, to be gladdened by him. The extent is universal worldwide. But also there's language here that speaks very tellingly and very encouragingly about the effectiveness of the summons that is made by King Jesus. Notice there in verse 5, surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you. The nations, the prophet says, will hasten.

God says through the prophet, the nations will hasten to King Jesus. You know, in our theological vocabulary, we talk about effectual calling, and we use that expression in the experience of the believer, God's work by His Spirit in the life of a believer, how God effectually calls. His call is irresistible. Well, here you have this same idea, really, the same truth, but in the realm, not of the individual, but in the realm of a world mission. The summons of King Jesus is an effectual summons.

To the extent that the nations hasten to Him, not reluctantly, not under coercion, not under any sense of obligation or even of fear, but rather a delight to hasten to Jesus. In biblical Christianity, there's no place for crusades or forced conversions. Now, that may be what we find, perhaps, in other religions and indeed in Christianity's past. Sadly, this has formed part of it, but there's no place for it in the light of the Scriptures. But why do the nations hasten to Jesus? Well, the passage tells us, at least it tells us in part, because of something the Father has done for His Son. And what has He done for His Son? Well, we're told that He has endowed Him with splendor, or to use other language, He has glorified Him. Notice the logic of what's being said. We'll read verse 5 again. Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you. Why? Why will they do that?

Because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for He has endowed you with splendor. And what's the prophet saying? What is God saying? God is saying that Jesus is so attractive, so beautiful, so inviting, that the nations hasten to Him. And this is something the Father, in a sense, has done for His Son. He's endowed Him with splendor. He's glorified Him.

How so? Of course, there is a very real sense in which the Son has an intrinsic splendor, glory, that He shares with His Father, that He has always shared with His Father. But there is also a sense in which the Father has endowed Him with splendor. Well, again, I repeat the question, how so? Well, in the mission that He gave Him to perform. The glory and splendor of Jesus is seen by us, in His perfect life, His sinless life. It is seen in His atoning death. We know the language of the New Testament, how Jesus was glorified in His death. It is seen in His resurrection, His conquest of death, His rising again to new life. It's seen in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, as He has given a name that is above every name, His splendor, His glory. There's a sense in which the Father endows Him, grants Him, this splendor, this visible splendor in the eyes of the nations.

[20 : 22] And so the nations hasten to Him. Such is the beauty, such is the glory, such is the majesty, the splendor, the comeliness of Jesus that the nations hasten to Him. It is a glorious and a beautiful picture that is painted here. Let me just say very briefly something about the citizens of King Jesus.

We're seeing what King Jesus does. He summons the nations. But what about the citizens of King Jesus? We've been brought in to this kingdom. We've been drawn. We've seen His loveliness, and we've hastened to Him. What are we to do as the church of Jesus, as a congregation of the church of Jesus Christ? Well, I suggested that the you in verse 5 could be understood in a secondary sense as referring to Israel or the church. And if we accept that possibility, what does that tell us about who we are and what we are to do? Perhaps especially what we are to do. Well, what do we do as citizens of the kingdom, as citizens of this King Jesus who is summoning the nations? Well, quite simply, we participate with Jesus in summoning the nations. We do so under His leadership and command. It's His mission, and we are simply privileged participants in what He is doing. And how do we summon the nations? Well, we do so by pointing to Jesus, by pointing to, by describing in the measure that we're able, the beauty and the splendor of Jesus, by sharing with others who this Jesus is, how wonderful He is, how marvelous He is, how splendid He is. That's how we draw the nations to Jesus, by lifting Him up, that others might see and discover for themselves something of His splendor. And that's something that we can do here and now in Aberdeen. The nations have come to us. The nations of the world represented in our neighborhood. I was speaking to Martha just yesterday about little lambs on Friday morning, and she was saying how she was sitting at these little tables for the children doing the crafts, and there were mums sitting around with their children. And it was just a couple of tables. It wasn't a large number of people. But around the tables, they worked out as they looked around the table. There were eight nations represented around that little table at little lambs. The nations have come to Aberdeen. And we are given this privilege, this opportunity to lift up Jesus to them, to show them the beauty, the splendor of Jesus, that they would hasten to Him. And I wonder if we're persuaded about the truth of this passage of the effectiveness of the summons of Jesus. You see, here the prophet and God through the prophet doesn't contemplate a failure. He doesn't contemplate the possibility that Jesus will summon and nobody will come. He doesn't contemplate the possibility that Jesus will summon the nations and the nations will say, well, I'm not interested. No, the nations hasten to Him.

They hasten to Him. They delight to be drawn by Him. The summons is good news, not some burdensome duty that is being imposed upon them. And we participate with Him in this summons.

But I think that we're called to do more than simply point to Jesus and His splendor, an important task though that is. I think we are to reflect something of His splendor. Again, if we take the you of verse 5 there in verse 5, surely you will summon nations you know not. If we take that to be speaking to us in a secondary sense, then we need to go on and see the you at the end of the verse is also speaking of us in some secondary sense, for He has endowed you with splendor.

And is that not the case? Is that not so? Is it not the case that we as God's people have been endowed by God with splendor, with a beauty not our own, and that that is also to serve as a means of drawing the nations to the King?

[24 : 52] Maybe I can capture this and we'll close with this by reflecting on two senses of the word inviting. I did that very fleetingly this morning in speaking about God as an inviting God. And to think of the word inviting in its two senses as a verb and as an adjective, because it is both or it can be used in both ways. So, first of all, think of it as a verb and we're thinking about what we have to do.

Well, if you think of the word inviting, the word inviting as a verb, well, we are to invite. It's what we need to do. We are to get out there and we are to be ever inviting others to Jesus.

Something I need to do, it's something you need to do. It's what we're called to do as we participate with Jesus in summoning the nations. We invite. Something we do. But let's think of that word as an adjective. We are to be inviting. As individuals, but especially as a community of God's people, we are to live and love in such a way that others hasten to be part of us. As they hasten to Jesus because of his splendor, that they would also hasten to us in the measure that we reflect something of the splendor and the beauty and the loveliness of Jesus. And I wonder in what measure that is so. And I wonder how we need to think hard about that and reflect on where we are in that regard. Are we a people that by our very existence and by the manner in which we relate one to another invite, invite, invite, draw others to our Savior? Well, God invites us to be refreshed and nourished and gladdened by and in Him. But He does so as He draws us in to become members of His kingdom or family.

And as citizens of His kingdom, we share in the mission of the King to summon the nations to Jesus. And so, my commission to you, my commission that it comes to us all, go and summon, invite, and be inviting. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the profound encouragement of being encouragement of being reminded that Jesus is a King whose purposes will not be frustrated. The task that He has been given by you is one that He will perform. He is even now summoning the nations to Himself. And even now, we witness how that summons, that call is an effectual call.

And we see the nations, men and women, from every tribe and people and nation and language, hastening to Jesus. We delight in that and we rejoice in that. We pray that we would see something of that here in Aberdeen and that we would see something of that here in our own congregation, that we would lift up Jesus, that we would point people to Jesus in all His loveliness. But we pray also that which is maybe more difficult, that we would know something, that we would be and reflect something of that beauty and splendor that draws others to us and through us to our Savior. And we pray all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.